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ABSTRACT

Small communities seldom have the ethnic and racial diversity that can provide multicultural experiences for teacher trainees. Cross cultural training, an aspect of multicultural teacher education, provides experience in understanding the way a culture conditions ways of learning, behaving, and perceiving, and the ability to look at cultural phenomenon from the perspective in which it occurs. If experience with cultural diversity is not available, trainees can be placed in settings such as mental health facilities, units for the mentally retarded, alcohol and drug counseling facilities, programs for the aged, programs for abused women, or correctional facilities. Each of these settings can provide a culturally diverse experience. Working in a correctional facility brings quick awareness of the "institutional" culture that the inmates live in. The "drug culture" is in evidence in drug and alcohol abuse programs. Through working with a mental health program which is trying to establish a center for adult mentally retarded in a community, one comes in contact with societal objections similar to those resulting from having an ethnic minority family move into a different community. (JD)

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EXPERIENTIAL CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACHES IN MULTICULTURAL EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES IN THE SMALL COMMUNITY

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EXPERIENTIAL CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACHES IN MULTICULTURAL EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES IN THE SMALL COMMUNITY

It has been accepted in teacher education and in general that an early field experience component is not only helpful, but also crucial, to the teacher trainee's preparation for student teaching as well as for the real world of teaching.[1] The object of such experiences, of course, is to allow students to have a concrete, personal, observable and subjective learning experience.[2]

The response to this apparent need by most colleges and universities has been overwhelming with a required, early field experience component as an integral part of their programs. The commonality, however, in most programs is that these early field experiences almost exclusively take the form of classroom observations and participation.[3] No one can refute that teacher trainees need extensive classroom experiences. When we begin to consider preparing teachers for culturally diverse settings, we may find that such early field experience settings are inadequate. What are needed are experiences in culturally diverse settings, not only for classroom activities, but more importantly for non-school activities. The reality of the situation in education today, however, is not positive in this regard. Mahan and Boyer in a 1980 survey of directors of student teaching and early field experiences report few effective multicultural components in teacher preparation sequences.[4]

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[1]Bernice Seiforth, "The Emergence of Early Field Experiences," Peabody Journal of Education, v. 57, n., Oct. 1978, p. 11.

[2]Nobleza, Asuncion-Lande, "Perspectives on Experimental Learning in Intercultural Education," 1979, ED 163 528, p. 2.

[3]Seiforth, 1979, p. 13.

[4]James Mahan and Virginia Boyle, "Field Experiences and Non-Field Components of Multicultural Teacher Preparation: An Evaluative Survey," 1980, ED 186 405, p. 5.

In order to prepare students adequately for culturally diverse settings, it is necessary not only to make the preparation more multicultural, but also to incorporate cross-cultural training approaches within such a multicultural teacher education program. In preparing teachers for multicultural settings, we must think beyond merely giving them culturally diverse classroom experiences. We must include a major component of off-campus early field experiences in non-school settings which are diverse cultural settings. In the preparation of teachers we must concern ourselves with an additional dimension of teacher training--cross-cultural experiences which are effectively found in non-school settings.[5]

Cross cultural training can be an excellent aspect of ~~multicultural~~ teacher education, for we are concerned that our trainees work successfully in culturally diverse school settings. An important part of cross-cultural training is cross-cultural communication:

> Cross-cultural communication refers to the communicative process (in its fullest sense) between people of different cultural backgrounds. It may take place among individuals, or between social, political, or economic entities, in different cultures . . . . This includes non-verbal as well as verbal communication and the use of differing codes, linguistic and non-linguistic. Culture is viewed as having a major influence on the communication process.[6]

It is obvious that in order to experience cross-cultural communication and all its aspects we must provide trainees with experiences in non-school settings

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[5]Ned Seelye, et al., "Training for Multicultural Education Competencies," in Margaret Pusch, Multicultural Education: A Cross-Cultural Training Approach, Intercultural Network Inc., La Grange Park, Ill., 1979, p. 97.

[6]Margaret Pusch (ed.), Multicultural Education: A Cross Cultural Training Approach, Intercultural Network, Inc., La Grange Park, Ill., 1979, p. 6.

in order to provide this cultural communication. In addition to communication, cross-cultural training also addresses the areas of understanding the way a culture conditions ways of learning, behaving, and perceiving, and the ability to look at cultural phenomenon from the perspective of the culture in which it occurs.[7]

The nature of cross-cultural training, then, is:

> . . . to provide a framework within which people can develop skills and acquire the knowledge that increases their ability to function effectively in a bi- or multicultural environment and to derive satisfaction from the intercultural experience. It fosters sensitivity to, appreciation of and respect for all cultures. It is an affirming experience and this affirmation works to reinforce the role and position of diverse groups in a pluralistic society. It functions to reduce tensions and build bridges among people of differing cultural backgrounds. It also places heavy stress on the learning potential available in intercultural encounters, ways of taking advantage of those opportunities and the acceptance of cultural diversity as a human resource rather than merely as an impediment to communication.[8]

Traditional approaches to things cultural has been to study about them, to learn about groups, etc. Even in the area of social justice, one learned about empathy, prejudice, discrimination and racism. The use of simulation has often been seen as a way of allowing trainees to experience some of these concepts. Although simulation can be effective, it should be used sparingly. As Keeton states,

> . . . the greater the reliance on simulation, the greater the likelihood that some critical and unexpected factor at play in reality may render the preparation inadequate.[9]

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[7]Pusch, 1979, p. 7.

[8]Seelye, 1979, p. 95.

[9]M. T. Keeton, Experiential Learning, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1976, pp. 2-3.

It is important, therefore, to use experience-based education as the affirmation that learning can and does occur in a variety of experiential settings.[10]

A question that comes to mind if the above is accepted is "How will it be possible to provide multicultural experiential activities in non-school settings in small communities?" The answer may be in the definition of multiculturalism. We need to use a broad definition in which ethnicity is one aspect along with other aspects such as religion, sexism, exceptionality, etc. Once this broad view is accepted, it is possible to plan realistically for non-school, multicultural early field experiences in any setting whether it be urban, rural, large city, or small town. The key element to keep in mind is that a cross-cultural training approach is being used. In this approach, as has already been stated, we are interested in the trainees' experiencing cultural diversity, in their becoming aware of its elements, adapting to it, and successfully communicating cross-culturally.

The most obvious setting is the ethnically diverse one where students are placed in agencies or programs servicing one or more minority populations. This can be an excellent experience and one to be sought in any cross-cultural approach. However, if ethnic diversity is not available using the broad view of multiculturalism, trainees can be placed in settings such as mental health facilities, mentally retarded units, alcohol and drug facilities, programs for the aged, women abuse programs or correctional facilities. Each of these settings can provide a culturally diverse experience. Anyone working in a correctional facility becomes quickly aware of the "institutional" culture that the inmates live by. Working in drug and alcohol abuse programs, one becomes aware of the

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[10]Barry Heerman, "Experiential Learning," 1979, ED 194 145, p. 5.

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"drug culture." Through working with a mental health program which is trying to establish a center for adult mentally retarded in a community, one comes into contact with societal objections strikingly similar to societal objections resulting from having an ethnic minority family move into a different community. In order for teacher training programs to use such diversity positively, creativity, a willingness to risk, and an application of cross-cultural training approaches are needed. As Hoopes concludes:

> It is our belief that it is from within this nexus of human interaction that the clash of cultural differences reverberates through society. And it is here that teachers and teacher trainers must look for answers as to how they can most effectively meet their responsibilities as educators in a multicultural society.[11]

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[11] David Hoopes, "Intercultural Communication Concepts and the Psychology of Intercultural Experience," in Margaret Pusch (ed.), Multicultural Education: A Cross Cultural Approach, Intercultural Network, La Grange Park, Ill., 1979, p. 36.

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